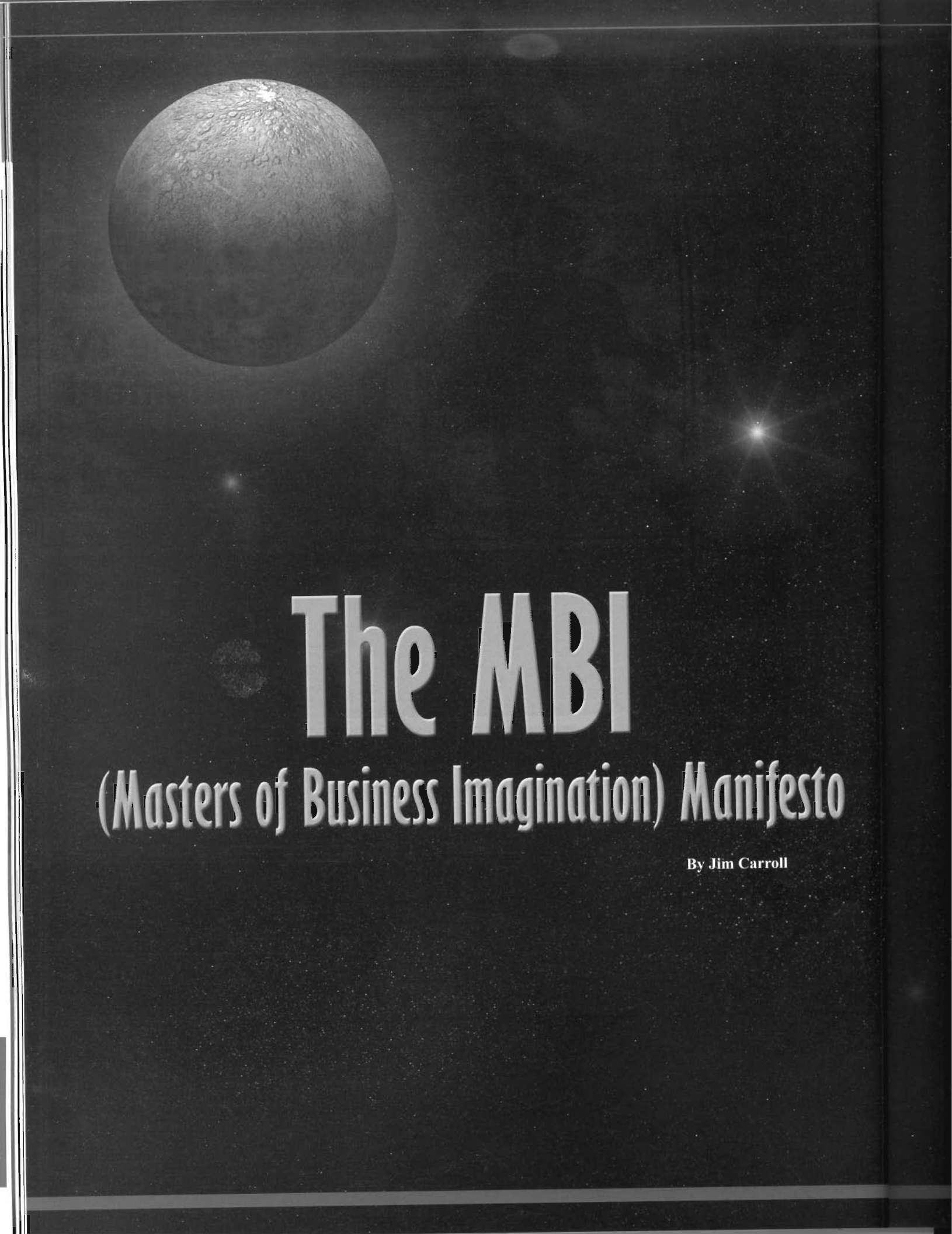


The MBI
(Masters of Business Imagination) Manifesto

By Jim Carroll

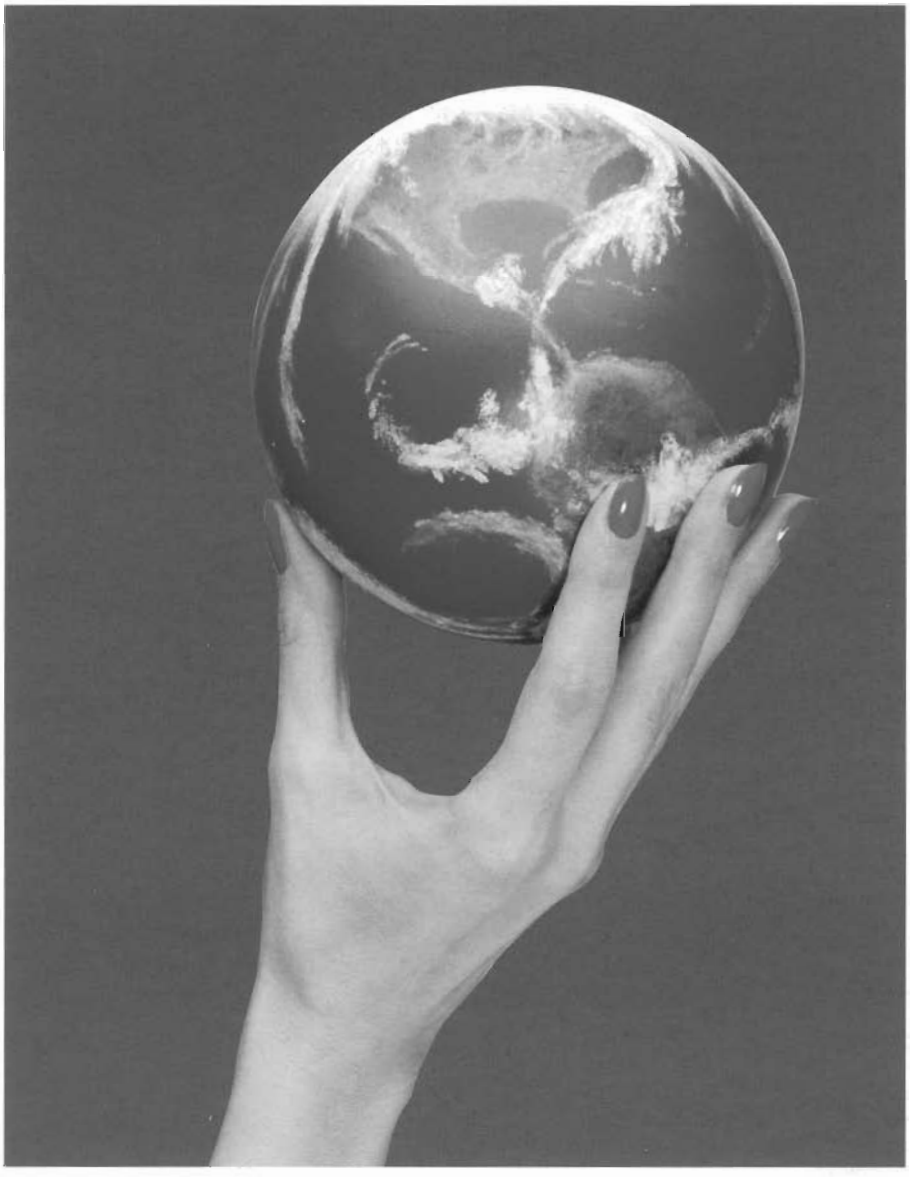
Enough already!

Complacency in a time of rapid, disruptive change can be a death sentence, not only for organizations, but for the careers and skills of those who work there! It's time to abandon the thinking that has had you anchored firmly to the past and to shift your focus to the future with enthusiasm, motivation and imagination.

You can do this by abandoning any pretence that the skills of yesterday will be important tomorrow. It is time to move beyond the thinking that has led us to a world of MBAs - Masters of Business Administration - and focus upon the critical skill that will take you into the future. The world doesn't need more administrators. It needs more MBIs - Masters of Business Imagination!

The Criticality of Change

Clearly, you need different skills to take you into a future that is becoming far more complex, challenging and different by the minute. How can you keep operating the way you do - with the same culture, structure, rules and methodologies, when the rate of change that envelops your organization is so dramatic?



MBIs possess a unique and critical skill: they can spur others around them to develop similar levels of imaginative thinking.

We live in an era of unprecedented and relentless change: the emergence of China as a super-power, hyper-innovation, business market turmoil, constant career change and rapid scientific advances. Competition is changing overnight, and product lifecycles often last for just a few months. Permanence has been torn apart.

We are in a time that demands a new agility and flexibility, and everyone must have the skills and insight to prepare for a future that is rushing at them faster than ever before. Most people don't have such a capability; indeed, I've come to believe that most people continue to stumble and meander their way into the future, without any firm grasp of how their skills, knowledge or industry is evolving. Without such insight, they have no idea what they must do in order to thrive in an era of rapid change.

Worse yet, they focus on managing, rather than leading. Administering, rather than inspiring. Complying,

rather than creating. The result is that they continue to wake up each morning and think, "What happened to the world I knew?" Their focus has been misdirected; they've become experts in "administration" at a time when what they really need is a lot more "imagination."

Here is my call to action! It is time that progressive, future-oriented leaders focus on developing their skills so that they can be honored with the title of Masters of Business Imagination!

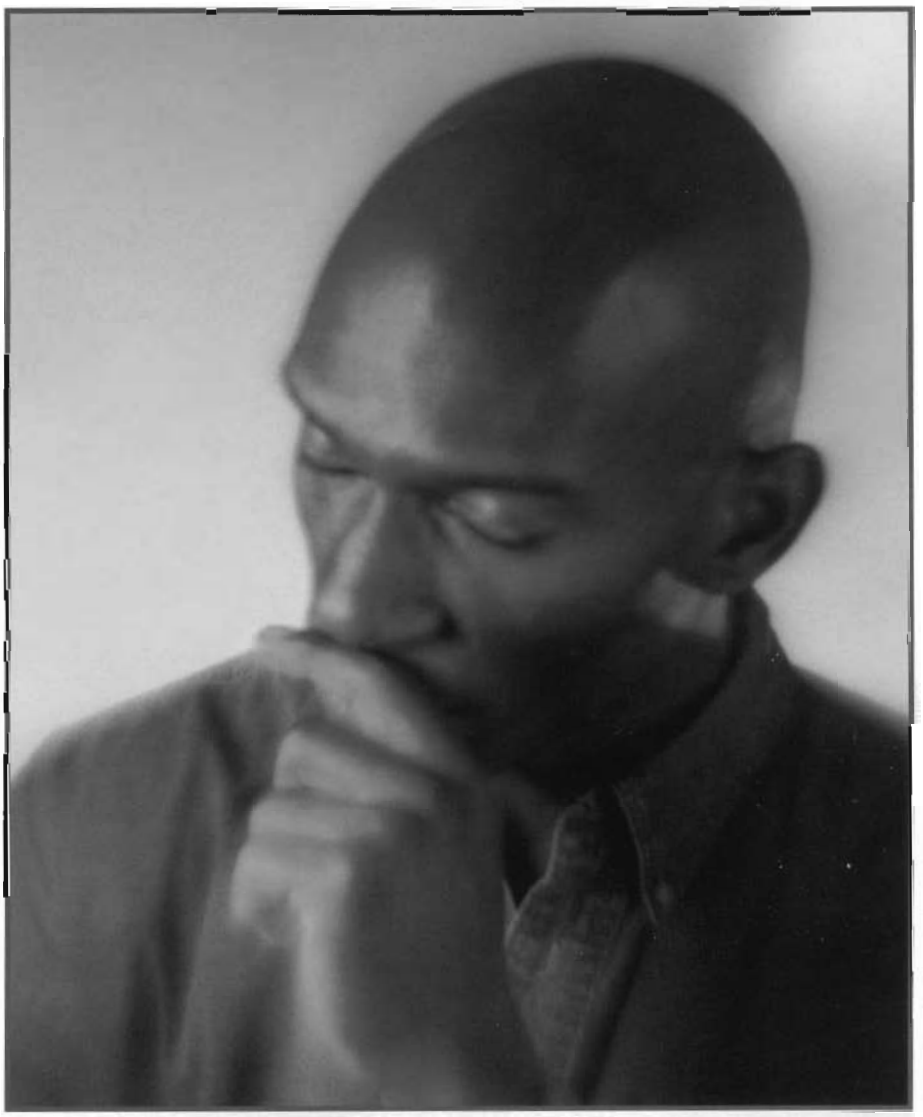
The Elements of an MBI

I am still working out the detailed curriculum and standards for the MBI degree, yet even at this early stage, I believe it is possible to identify the core attributes and attitudes that individuals awarded with the degree possess.

MBIs see things differently.

MBIs don't look at things like most people. They continuously challenge the assumptions that surround them, and use that as the formative fuel for their creativity. They know that the foundation of everything around them is shifting and twisting, and that it is in such movement that the future is being defined. They are willing to abandon any attitudes that might cause them to believe that everything is going to stay the same, with the result that they view the world through a different set of lenses. These lenses help them to generate new ideas, come up with imaginative solutions and think creatively on a continuous basis.

An MBI is the most important degree program for any executive for the future.

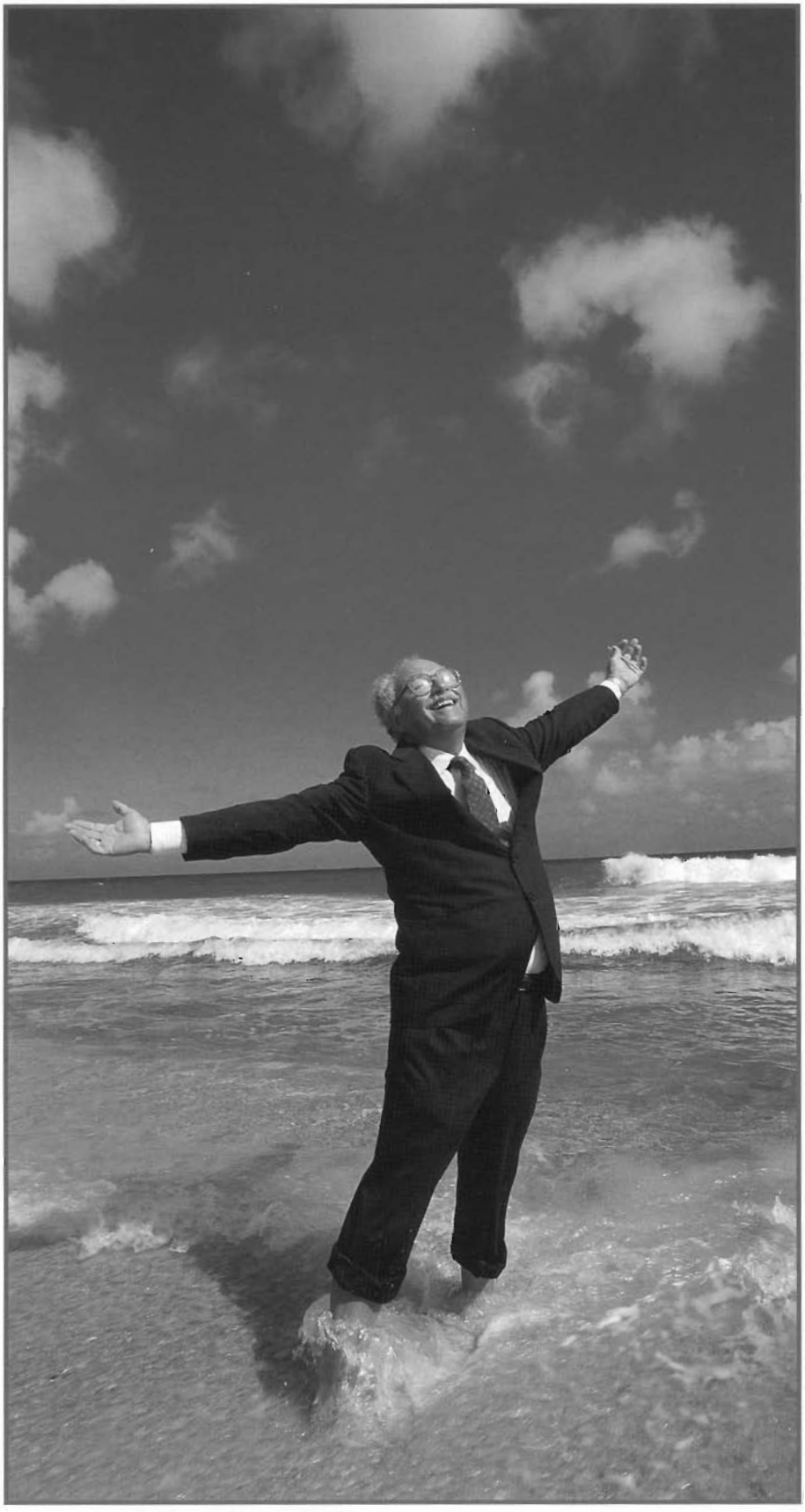


MBIs spur creativity in other people.

MBIs possess a unique and critical skill: they can spur others around them to develop similar levels of imaginative thinking. In doing so, they can shake a team out of its administrative complacency and motivate them into a mode in which they are able to rethink, redo and re-imagine to lend much more value to the organization.

MBIs focus on opportunity, not threat.

MBIs realize that in the absence of action, continuous disruptive change inevitably has negative consequences. With this as the foundation of their attitude, they have come to learn that their focus must be to continually examine how to capitalize on change in order to turn it into opportunity.



They regularly scan for signs of disruptive threat, and rather than viewing it as something to be feared, ask themselves, "Where is the potential here?"

■ MBIs refuse to accept the status quo.

Ogden Nash once observed that "progress is great, but it has gone on far too long." Such stale thinking doesn't drive the passion of MBIs: instead, they look at the world around them and constantly question how they might shake things up a bit, not simply to cause change, but in order to provide a climate in which people can succeed and excel.

■ MBIs have the ability to bring ideas to life.

MBIs motivate people to excel by helping them to get over their own concern and worry about the future. They paint a picture of where the organization is going to go and what it is going to take to get there. They provide forward-oriented goals and objectives that are framed around the change that surrounds them, and use this as the fuel to spur their team on to achievement.

■ MBIs have the skills to learn and unlearn.

MBIs know that we live in a world in which learning has become their job, and just-in-time knowledge has become the foundation for future success. They don't make the dangerous assumption that what they know will carry them in to tomorrow; they realize that the future will require skills that are infinitely

more complex. Rather than viewing this as a burden to be assumed, they view the opportunity to continuously learn something new with passion and enthusiasm.

■ MBIs refuse to say the word "can't."

MBIs refuse to accept limitations. They know that barriers, perceived or otherwise, are simply temporary roadblocks that they can get around with fresh insight, imaginative analysis and creative thinking.

■ MBIs accept challenges with passion and enthusiasm.

Most studies continue to show that many people go to work each day with dread, fear and worry being their constant companions. Once they arrive, they fall into a monotonous routine of meetings, checklists and to-do's. Not MBIs: they approach each day as a new and exciting opportunity! They know that the world is wide open for them to use their ways of thinking differently to shake things up, discover opportunity and redefine parameters. Their passion as leaders is such that their enthusiasm becomes infectious; the most successful of them can begin to steer the entire organization towards their fresh and exciting way of thinking.

■ MBIs embraces change rather than shying away from it.

MBIs relish the idea of change, for it is the oxygen that fuels their fire every day.

■ MBIs listen to people who are different from them.

Effective MBIs know that the attitudes they possess can restrict them in their thinking, and that the knowledge they have is but a sliver of what there is to know. The result is that they are constantly on the prowl for new ideas and new ways of thinking, and they understand that often, this can come from those who think differently than they do. Examine the makeup of a team assembled by an MBI, and you will find a group of people who are all very different. That's because an MBI knows that a multitude of difference can bring far more creative thinking than the sameness of a group of clones.

■ MBIs live for the opportunity to have ideas challenged and debated.

MBIs truly understand that their own biases, developed through years of experience, can often blind them to real opportunity. The result is that they are eager to have any idea assessed, analyzed and challenged. They encourage debate, knowing that it is through such a process that a simple idea can be turned into a "great idea."

■ Instead of saying, "It won't work," MBIs ask the question, "How can we make it work?"

MBIs refuse to accept failure as an option, and instead, constantly work to ensure that goals are achieved. If they don't have what is needed to make it work, they look for creative and imaginative ways to get around that limitation.

MBIs don't look at things like most people. They continuously challenge the assumptions that surround them, and use that as the formative fuel for their creativity.

An MBI is the most important degree program for any executive for the future. Although the degree isn't yet enshrined in any university curriculum - it doesn't even show up in a Google search! - it is clearly what every executive must possess. The MBI Manifesto is a call to action, a call to creativity and a call for imagination. Pursue the MBI, and you will rediscover a world in which change and challenge is turned into opportunity and success.■

Jim Carroll, FCA, is a leading international futurist, trends and innovation expert, with clients such as the BBC, Motorola, Verizon and DaimlerChrysler. He provides keynotes that spur on creative and original thinking, as well as executive programs that can instill a culture of innovation and forward-oriented leadership within an organization He has just released his book, What I Learned From Frogs in Texas: Saving Your Skin With Forward Thinking Innovation.